OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Consultation Summary

What are we consulting about?

New legislation requires Oxford City Council (and all local authorities, in tranches) to consult upon which one of two forms of executive decision making arrangements it will follow after our local elections in May 2012. The Council needs to have reached a decision on this, following consultation, by the end of December 2010.

What are the Council’s existing decision making arrangements?

At present the Council has a leader and executive style of decision making. The Council elects the Leader for a one year term, decides upon the size of the executive (the City Executive Board) and appoints members of Council to the City Executive Board. Those members have specific areas of political responsibility for executive functions and these are allocated by the Leader. Most decisions that the Council takes are executive decisions but planning, licensing and all regulatory matters are not. Changes are not required to non-executive decisions by the new legislation. Executive decisions reached by the City Executive Board may be “called in” or reviewed within certain timescales.

Some decisions (e.g. agreeing the Budget, agreeing some plans and policies) may only be reached by full Council.

Options Upon Which Local Authorities are Being Asked to Consult

Leader and Cabinet

This is similar in some respects to our current arrangements. However, under this form, the Council elects the Leader for a four year term and the Leader then decides upon the size and composition of the executive and upon the allocation of executive responsibilities. The Leader is responsible for appointing a deputy leader, also to serve for a four year term.

The leader can be removed from office by resolution of the Council if the Council’s Constitution permits this.

Elected Mayor and Cabinet

Under this form, the Mayor would be elected by the Oxford electorate. The person elected would serve in office for four years and could not be removed by full council. Once elected, the elected Mayor would decide upon the size and composition of the executive (which would consist of elected members of
Council) and upon the allocation of executive responsibilities. The elected Mayor would chair Council meetings if that is what Council wanted. Otherwise the Lord Mayor would chair the meetings.

Has the Council got a preferred option?

Full Council on 12th July 2010 decided that its preferred option was the Leader and Cabinet model. Council felt that this option was better suited to the circumstances of the City. In its present form this model has stood the Council well for nearly 10 years. The leader and cabinet model provides the links between councillors, their wards and the electorate. The elected Mayor and cabinet model introduces the politics of personality into local politics which the city council does not believe is conducive to good and sound and rational decision-making. The link between councillors, their wards and the electorate is less distinct with this model.

Consultation

This consultation will run for a period of 12 weeks ending on 8th October 2010. A summary of public responses will be presented to the City Executive Board and to Council at the expiry of the 12 week period.

If you have any views or would like any further information then please send your comments to:-

   Head of Law and Governance
   Oxford City Council
   Town Hall
   Blue Boar Street
   Oxford City Council
   OX1 4EY

Or by email to wreed@oxford.gov.uk

to arrive by no later than Friday 8th October. If you have any questions relating to the consultation, or to the options, please contact William Reed, Democratic Services Manager on 01865 252230 or by email or in writing as referred to above.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Why are we consulting on only two options?**

   Legislation requires all local authorities to consult on just two options of governance, namely a Leader and Cabinet model and an Elected Mayor and Cabinet model. It does not require consultation on any other options because, as the law stands at present, there are no other options open to local authorities.
2. **Can we continue with our present arrangements?**

   No, we cannot. The “Weak Leader” model that we operate under at present is being abolished.

3. **What does the new Coalition Government say about the requirement to change governance arrangement?**

   The new Coalition Government has indicated that it will in due course repeal the legislation that requires governance arrangements to change. However, the Government has said that consultation, at minimal cost, should be undertaken by local authorities on the change required by legislation. What the Coalition Government has gone on to say is that the Government is committed to allowing Councils to return to the Committee system, should they wish to, and to pursue an Elected Mayor model of governance. The Government accepts that any governance model adopted as a result of the present consultation may be further changed within a year or so.

4. **When would new arrangements come into operation?**

   For Oxford, new arrangements would come into operation in May 2012.

5. **For how long would a Strong Leader be elected?**

   Four years.

6. **For how long would an Elected Mayor be elected?**

   Four years.

7. **How could a Strong Leader be removed from office?**

   A strong leader could be removed from office by resolution of the Council if the Council’s constitution permitted for this.

8. **How could an Elected Mayor be removed from office?**

   The Council cannot remove an elected Mayor. The Mayor could however choose to resign from office or could be disqualified if the Mayor breached the Members’ Code of Conduct.

9. **What happens if there is a change of political control?**

   If there is a change of political control then, so far as the Strong Leader is concerned, the Leader would either resign that position or be removed from office by Council.

   As far as the Elected Mayor is concerned, a change of political control would not effect their term of office.
10. **Does an Elected Mayor have to be a member of a political party?**

   An Elected Mayor may be a member of a political party or they could be totally independent.

11. **Can a City Councillor be an elected Mayor?**

   A City Councillor could stand as a mayoral candidate but, if elected, would need to stand down as a City Councillor. The law does not permit an individual to hold both roles simultaneously. However, a City Councillor can hold the position of Civic Mayor (i.e. Lord Mayor)

12. **How many elected Mayors are there?**

   There are currently 12 elected mayors. Four unitary authorities have elected Mayors. Three London Boroughs have elected Mayors. Two District Councils have elected Mayors. Two metropolitan districts have elected mayors. And of course London has an elected Mayor.

13. **How many Councils operate a Council Leader and Cabinet Model?**

   318

14. **Has the Council held a referendum in the past for an elected Mayor?**

   Yes, in 2002. At that time, more people voted against having an elected Mayor than voted for this system of governance.